

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

SE Politics
HD **Politics Briefing: Do you know who is in the middle class? Also: Finance ministers meet in Ottawa**
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Hello,

Since the Trudeau Liberals first came to power in 2015, they have had a key constituency: the middle class. The ubiquitous phrase “the middle class and people working hard to join it” popped up, most recently, in yesterday’s [fiscal update](#). The new cabinet even has a minister sworn to its prosperity.

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But who are the middle class? Is it about the size of the family, the weight of the wallet, the number of cars in the garage? Is it an economic designation, or more [a state of mind](#)?

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is doing the rounds of year-end interviews with radio and TV stations this week, has an answer. On Breakfast Television this morning, anchor Melanie Ng [asked him](#) (around 14 minutes in): “Can you define who the middle class is?”

Mr. Trudeau replied: “Canadians know who’s in the middle class.” He continued by saying his government is more focused on the issues he says affect the middle class, such as affordability.

He may be on to something. A recent Nanos Research poll conducted for The Globe asked Canadians who is in the middle class. The answers diverged wildly, but nearly four in five respondents could agree on one thing: [they are it](#).

So who is the middle class? The government view appears to be that there is no objective standard for the middle class. Instead, to paraphrase former U.S. Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart: “We know it when we see it.”

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TODAY’S HEADLINES

In Mr. Trudeau’s year-end interview with CTV, he suggested it would be “[too dangerous](#)” for government officials to rescue a four-year-old Canadian girl who’s in a Syrian refugee camp, and that Alberta Premier Jason Kenney is [not serious](#) about fighting climate change.

Finance Minister Bill Morneau is meeting with his provincial and territorial counterparts today. Yesterday, the federal government [released](#) how much money they are sending to the provinces next year. Today the

ministers try to convince Ottawa that they [need more money](#) from the Health Transfer and that the feds should really raise the cap on the Fiscal Stabilization Program.

The federal government has also released how much residents of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta will [receive](#) from their carbon-tax rebates. (Or “Climate Action Incentives,” as they call them.) Alberta government lawyers continue to [fight the tax in court](#), arguing that the next step would be Ottawa dictating what cars provincial residents are allowed to drive.

Public spending on medication [grew 7 per cent](#) last year.

A member of the Conservative Fund – the money arm of the Conservative Party – said on the record that [proper protocols](#) were not followed when the party paid for at least some of the private-school fees for Andrew Scheer’s kids.

Hamilton’s mayor and city council are [not happy](#) that the Ontario government has pulled the plug on the city’s light-rail transit plans. Transportation Minister Caroline Mulroney says she understands the news is “frustrating,” but that the plan would just cost too much money.

And government e-mails [obtained by the Ottawa Citizen](#) under access-to-information law reveal that a lot of thought went into a Health Canada tweet that used the Jack and Jill rhyme to warn Canadians to use protection when having sex. What did not get a lot of thought by bureaucrats until the tweets were released: the fact that Jack and Jill were siblings, and children.

[Robyn Urback \(The Globe and Mail\)](#) on why Rona Ambrose would make a strong candidate for Conservative leader: “She’s an Alberta-born social moderate with proven leadership experience and strong party support, who can also one-up Mr. Trudeau’s feminist slogans with an actual degree in feminist studies and advocacy efforts outside of politics. That’s a collection of qualities that Peter MacKay, for example, whose name has also been floated for leadership, can’t rival.”

[Diane Francis \(Financial Post\)](#) on why it should be John Baird: “Canada needs a Canadian version of Donald Trump — genteel but strong — who is proud of the country and just as assertive about advancing its intrinsic values and interests.”

[Shachi Kurl \(Ottawa Citizen\)](#) on social conservatism in the Conservative leadership race: “Really smart people remind me that the clammy, damp feeling of being stuck in opposition – combined with a true loathing of Trudeau – will be enough for the Conservative Party of Canada to move in a more politically palatable (read: centrist) direction this time in choosing its new leadership. I, in turn, remind them that the grassroots, already alienated by Ottawa, may feel just as strong an urge to choose a leader who reflects their values. Further, the faction that wishes to see the party stay committed to social conservatism remains strong.”

[Maya Wang \(The Globe and Mail\)](#) on China’s government: “Unlike in Mao’s time, when China was isolated, Mr. Xi’s policies now have global implications. The world should be alarmed by the trajectory of the Chinese government’s worldview. Its mistreatment of Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, the people of Hong Kong and now foreign diplomatic staff should be a warning for all.”

[Eleanor Boyle \(The Globe and Mail\)](#) on the case for rationing: “It’s too bad meat is so tasty, driving so convenient and airline travel so desirable. Because those all create large amounts of greenhouse gases and worsen the climate crisis. We know it, and some of us feel guilty getting on a plane, hopping in the car or eating burgers. But how are we to cut back when we’re not sure what level of a high-emission behaviour is sustainable – and when everyone else is doing it?”

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